



achievement TESTING program

Information Bulletin

• Grade 9 English Language Arts •

2000 – 2001 School Year

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Grade 9 English Language Arts Assessment

General Description

The Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement test is composed of two parts—*Part A: Writing* and *Part B: Reading*.

Part A: Writing consists of two writing assignments—one narrative/essay and one functional—developed to be completed in two hours. At the beginning of the two hours, students will be given time to discuss both assignments with classmates in groups of two to four, or to think alone about them. During this discussion time, students may record their ideas on the *Planning* pages provided. The allotted two hours provides students with time for planning, drafting, and revising of both the narrative/essay and functional writing. An additional 30 minutes may be taken to complete the test.

Students may do their writing using a computer. For information about using word-processing technology to complete the written component of the achievement test, see the *General Information Bulletin, Achievement Testing Program, Grades 3, 6, and 9*.

Students may use a print or electronic dictionary (English language and/or bilingual) and a thesaurus when completing **only** *Part A: Writing*.

Part B: Reading (multiple choice) is developed to be completed in 75 minutes; however, students may take an additional 30 minutes to complete the test. The test consists of 55 multiple-choice questions based on reading selections from fiction, non-fiction, drama, poetry, and visual media. *Part B: Reading* has two booklets—one containing reading passages and one containing corresponding questions. Answers are recorded on a separate machine-scorable answer sheet.

Description of Language Arts Assessment Standards

The following statements describe what is expected of Grade 9 students who are meeting the *acceptable standard* or the *standard of excellence*, based on outcomes in the *Program of Studies*. These statements represent the standards against which student achievement is measured. It is important to remember that one test cannot measure all of the outcomes in the *Program of Studies*.

<i>Acceptable Standard</i>	<i>Standard of Excellence</i>
<p>Students meeting the <i>acceptable standard</i> are able to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• demonstrate sustained interest in reading, viewing, and listening to relatively short, uncomplicated stories, documentaries, and dramatic works• deal with uncomplicated, familiar details and ideas that are directly presented• expand, in writing, the narration of a personal experience depending on context, elaborate somewhat on their ideas, and sustain a topic for several pages of writing using appropriate, but conventional details• organize concrete, factual materials that contain simple ideas• understand more complex techniques of literary structure or organization such as cause and effect, foreshadowing, flashback, and comparison and contrast; on occasion, they can apply that knowledge to unfamiliar literature or apply these techniques in their own writing• analyze and synthesize ideas in a familiar context when the experience is close in time to their own experiences• be successful, without assistance, with conventional tasks, and, with conscious effort and/or assistance, complete increasingly complex tasks• independently understand, organize, and articulate course-related ideas and concepts in a concrete, direct, personal, and relatively uncomplicated manner• read relatively simple short novels, non-fiction selections, and narrative poems, and then clearly articulate (orally and in writing) the main idea, sequence of events, key details, and features of character and form	<p>Students meeting the <i>standard of excellence</i> are also able to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• read confidently and widely (mystery, romance, adventure, speculative fiction, poetry) and search for information from text• deal with abstract, complex details and ideas, and readily take risks with unfamiliar materials• read, write, and reflect on print and non-print text from many perspectives• analyze and evaluate ideas received from a wide variety of sources and appreciate how analysis can deepen their appreciation of the work• express their analysis through a variety of modes (writing, oral presentation, drawing, dramatization) with pertinent, specific, and imaginative detail• coherently develop and organize abstract, complex material• establish an appropriate focus for communication and select ideas and language to suit different purposes and audiences• identify, without assistance, areas in their own writing that need to be revised and/or elaborated• create final products that are essentially error-free• demonstrate interest, enthusiasm, and imagination when dealing with details and ideas that demand complex thought and understanding

Part A: Writing

Section I of *Part A: Writing* requires students to read short literary selections and then to write a narrative or essay in response to some aspect of the readings identified in the assignment. Section I includes a page labelled *Planning* and lined pages for the students' writing.

Section II of *Part A: Writing* is a functional piece of writing. This assignment requires students to write for a specific audience and to fulfill a specified purpose within a given context. Specified purposes may include writing letters, reports, instructions, or other functional tasks. This year's functional writing assignment requires students to write a business letter and correctly address a blank envelope. As in the narrative/essay assignment, the writer's ability to adjust content, order, tone, and diction to the situation is being tested. Section II includes a page labelled *Planning*, a blank envelope

that is to be addressed properly, and lined pages for the students' writing.

For both sections of *Part A: Writing*, students are asked to produce only one copy of their work. They are encouraged to make revisions and corrections directly on this copy. Because of the limited testing time, it is felt that students benefit most from spending the majority of their time in composing and revising their work, rather than in perfecting a "good copy."

Important Reminder

In the past, many students have written papers that were "off topic." Students' writing should be related to the prompt. **Students whose writing is unrelated to the prompt for functional writing will be awarded an Insufficient.**

Blueprint for Part A: Section I—Narrative/Essay Writing

The blueprint that follows outlines *Part A: Writing*, Section I, of the Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test. It delineates the categories under which summary data will be reported to schools and school authorities.

Reporting Category	Description of Writing Assignment	Standards
<p>*Content (selecting ideas and details to achieve a purpose)</p> <p><i>NEW</i> → Students respond to a given prompt by writing a narrative or essay. Students establish their purpose, select ideas and supporting details to achieve the purpose, and communicate in a manner appropriate to their audience.</p>	<p>The writing assignment requires students to respond to a prompt that consists of a topic and a collection of materials that students may use, if they wish. These materials include graphics, quotes, and short literary excerpts. Students may use ideas from previous experience and/or reading. Students are to respond by writing a narrative or essay.</p>	<p>Students' achievement in each reporting category will be described according to the following standard statements:</p> <p>Meets the <i>standard of excellence</i></p> <p>Approaches the <i>standard of excellence</i></p> <p>Clearly meets the <i>acceptable standard</i></p> <p>Does not clearly meet the acceptable standard</p> <p>Clearly below the acceptable standard</p> <p>Insufficient</p>
<p>*Organization (organizing ideas and details into a coherent whole)</p> <p><i>NEW</i> → Students organize their ideas to produce a unified and coherent narrative/essay that links events and details, sentences, and paragraphs to support the purpose.</p>		
<p>Sentence Structure (structuring sentences effectively)</p> <p><i>NEW</i> → Students control sentence structure and use a variety of sentence types, beginnings, and sentence lengths to enhance communication.</p>		
<p>Vocabulary (selecting and using words and expressions correctly and effectively)</p> <p><i>NEW</i> → Students choose specific words and expressions that are appropriate for their audience and effective in establishing a voice/tone that will help achieve their purpose.</p>		
<p>Conventions (using the conventions of written language correctly and effectively)</p> <p><i>NEW</i> → Students use conventions accurately and effectively to communicate.</p>		

*These categories are weighted to be worth twice as much as each of the others.

Blueprint for Part A: Section II—Functional Writing

The blueprint that follows outlines *Part A: Writing*, Section II, of the Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test. It delineates the categories under which summary data will be reported to schools and school authorities.

Reporting Category	Description of Writing Assignment	Standards
NEW Content (thought and detail) Students develop, organize, and evaluate ideas for a specified purpose and audience.	The functional writing assignment requires students to write to a specified audience in the context of a business letter. They are also expected to correctly address a blank envelope.	Students' achievement in each reporting category will be described according to the following standard statements:
NEW Content Management (using the conventions of written language correctly and effectively) Students communicate clearly and effectively by selecting words and phrases appropriate to their purpose. Students demonstrate control of sentence structure, usage, mechanics, and format.		Meets the <i>standard of excellence</i> Approaches the <i>standard of excellence</i> Clearly meets the <i>acceptable standard</i> Does not clearly meet the acceptable standard Clearly below the acceptable standard Insufficient

Content and Content Management are weighted equally.

Local Marking

Classroom teachers will be able to mark students' writing, using scoring guides like those in this bulletin, before returning tests to Alberta Learning.

A total score for a student's writing may be calculated by following the procedure below.

Narrative Writing

1. Assign a score of 1 to 5 for each of *content, organization, sentence structure, vocabulary, and conventions.*
2. Weight *content* and *organization* to be worth twice as much as the other categories by multiplying their scores by 2.

Maximum score possible for Narrative Writing = 35

Functional Writing

1. Assign a score of 1 to 5 for each of *content* and *content management.*
2. Multiply this total score by 2.

Maximum score possible for Functional Writing = 20

Total Score

1. Add the narrative and functional scores.

Total score for *Part A: Writing*

Narrative Writing	<u> </u> /35 (63.6%)
+ Functional Writing	<u> </u> /20 (36.4%)
= Total Score	<u> </u> /55 (100%)

The mark for writing is worth 50% of the total mark for Language Arts.

Samples of students' writing that exemplify the scoring criteria will be provided with the test materials, to support local marking.

Marks awarded locally can be submitted to Alberta Learning and will be used as the first reading of a student's response. The papers will then be marked centrally by Alberta Learning as the second reading. Both marks contribute to the student's final mark. In the case of a discrepancy between these two marks, papers will be adjudicated by a third reading, which will determine the final mark that a paper is awarded. In this way, valid and reliable individual and group results can be reported.

Papers that are not marked locally by teachers will be marked centrally only once. At least once a day, all markers mark a copy of the same paper for inter-rater reliability. All papers will be marked centrally in Edmonton in July.

Information for Teachers Participating in Central Marking

The Learner Assessment Branch will contact superintendents in the spring for their recommendations of markers. The approximately 165 Grade 9 teachers selected will reflect proportional representation from the various regions of Alberta. To qualify for recommendation by a superintendent, a prospective marker must satisfy ALL of the following conditions:

- ☒ have a valid Alberta Permanent Professional Teaching Certificate
- ☒ have taught the course for two years or more
- ☒ be teaching the course in the current school year
- ☒ be employed by a school authority at the time of marking
- ☒ be able to mark all days

Markers will be contacted in May, and the list of markers will be finalized no later than June 16. Group leaders will meet for one day before the marking session.

Each year, we have many more teachers nominated to mark than we have spots for marking. We must make sure that we have a balance of markers reflecting the student populations in various parts of the province. As well, we attempt to balance the representation of male and female markers, and of experienced and inexperienced markers. Unfortunately, not everyone whose name is submitted is selected.

The time allotted for marking is limited, hence markers are often asked to mark on Saturday and Sunday. The marking floor is open from 8:00 A.M. to 4:30 P.M., and markers are expected to be available to mark during those hours.

Scoring Guides

Narrative/Essay Writing

Content

Focus

When marking **CONTENT** appropriate for Grade 9 narrative/essay writing, the marker should consider how effectively the writer

- considers the reader
- establishes a purpose
- chooses ideas
- supports the response

Meets the Standard of Excellence 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The writing captivates and holds the reader's interest and is creative and/or original. • The writer's purpose, whether stated or implied, is clear and sustained. • The ideas used by the writer are carefully chosen and perceptive. • Supporting details are precise and often creative.
Approaches the Standard of Excellence 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The writing engages and holds the reader's interest. • The writer's purpose, whether stated or implied, is clear and generally sustained. • The ideas used by the writer are thoughtful. • Supporting details are relevant and specific.
Clearly Meets the Acceptable Standard 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The writing generally holds the reader's interest. • The writer's purpose, whether stated or implied, is evident but may not be sustained. • The ideas used by the writer are appropriate but conventional. • Supporting details are relevant but general.
Does Not Clearly Meet the Acceptable Standard 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The writing does not hold the reader's interest. • The writer's purpose, whether stated or implied, is vague and not sustained. • The ideas used by the writer are superficial. • Supporting details are scant and/or vague and/or irrelevant.
Clearly Below the Acceptable Standard 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The writing is confusing and/or frustrating for the reader. • The writer's purpose is not evident or is very vague and not sustained. • The ideas used by the writer are inappropriate. • Supporting details are irrelevant, inappropriate, and/or lacking.
Insufficient INS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The writer has written so little that it is not possible to assess Content.

Note: Content and Organization are weighted to be worth twice as much as the other categories.

Organization

Focus

When marking **ORGANIZATION** appropriate for Grade 9 narrative/essay writing, the marker should consider how effectively the writing demonstrates

- focus
- coherent order
- connections between events and/or details
- closure

Meets the Standard of Excellence 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The introduction is purposeful and interesting, and it clearly establishes an appropriate focus that is sustained. • Events and/or details are arranged in paragraphs in a purposeful and effective order, and coherence is maintained. • Transitions, either explicit or implicit, effectively connect events and/or details between sentences and between paragraphs. • Closure is effective and purposeful.
Approaches the Standard of Excellence 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The introduction is purposeful and clearly establishes an appropriate focus that is generally sustained. • Events and/or details are arranged in paragraphs in a purposeful order, and coherence is generally sustained. • Transitions, either explicit or implicit, appropriately connect events and/or details between sentences and between paragraphs. • Closure is appropriate and related to the focus.
Clearly Meets the Acceptable Standard 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The introduction is functional and establishes a focus that may be inconsistently sustained. • Events and/or details are arranged in a discernible order, although coherence may falter occasionally. • Transitions tend to be mechanical and may be used inconsistently between sentences and/or between paragraphs. • Closure is related to the focus but may be mechanical and/or artificial.
Does Not Clearly Meet the Acceptable Standard 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The introduction may lack purpose and/or may not be functional; any focus established by the writer may not be sustained. • The arrangement of events and/or details is not clearly discernible, and coherence falters frequently. • Transitions between sentences and/or between paragraphs are lacking or may be inappropriate. • Closure may be unrelated to the focus.
Clearly Below the Acceptable Standard 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The introduction, if present, is not functional or is inappropriate; no focus is established. • The arrangement of events and/or details is haphazard and incoherent. • Transitions are not used between sentences or between paragraphs. • Closure is inappropriate or missing.
Insufficient INS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The writing has been awarded an INS for Content.

Note: Content and Organization are weighted to be worth twice as much as the other categories.

Sentence Structure

Focus

When marking **SENTENCE STRUCTURE** appropriate for Grade 9 narrative/essay writing, the marker should consider the extent to which

- sentence structure is controlled
- sentence type and length are effective and varied
- sentence beginnings are varied

Proportion of error to length and complexity of response must be considered.

Meets the Standard of Excellence 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sentence structure is effectively and consistently controlled. • Sentence type and length are consistently effective and varied. • Sentence beginnings are consistently varied.
Approaches the Standard of Excellence 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sentence structure is consistently controlled. • Sentence type and length are usually effective and varied. • Sentence beginnings are often varied.
Clearly Meets the Acceptable Standard 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sentence structure is generally controlled, but may occasionally impede meaning. • Sentence type and length are sometimes effective and/or varied. • Some variety of sentence beginnings is evident.
Does Not Clearly Meet the Acceptable Standard 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sentence structure often lacks control, and this may impede the meaning. • Sentence type and length are rarely effective and varied; run-on sentences and/or sentence fragments, if present, often impede meaning. • There is little variety of sentence beginnings.
Clearly Below the Acceptable Standard 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sentence structure generally lacks control, and this often impedes meaning. • There is no variation of sentence type or length; run-on sentences and/or sentence fragments, if present, severely impede meaning. • There is no variety of sentence beginnings.
Insufficient INS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The writing has been awarded an INS for Content.

Vocabulary

Focus

When marking **VOCABULARY** appropriate for Grade 9 narrative/essay writing, the marker should consider the

- accuracy of the words and expressions selected by the writer
- effectiveness of the words and expressions selected by the writer
- appropriateness and effectiveness of the writer's voice/tone

Proportion of error to length and complexity of response must be considered.

Meets the Standard of Excellence 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Words and expressions are used accurately and deliberately to fulfill the writer's purpose. • Specific words and expressions are used to create vivid images and/or enrich details. • The writer's voice/tone is confident and appropriate, and it enhances the meaning.
Approaches the Standard of Excellence 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Words and expressions are often used accurately and effectively. • Specific words and expressions show some evidence of careful selection and some awareness of connotative effect. • The writer's voice/tone is clear and appropriate.
Clearly Meets the Acceptable Standard 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Words and expressions are generally used appropriately. • General words and expressions are sometimes used when specific words would be more effective. • The writer's voice/tone is discernible but may be inconsistent or uneven.
Does Not Clearly Meet the Acceptable Standard 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Words and expressions are generally used appropriately but may convey only vague meanings. • General words and expressions predominate; specific words, if present, may be misused. • The writer's voice/tone is not clearly established or is inappropriate.
Clearly Below the Acceptable Standard 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Words and expressions convey only vague meanings. • Words and expressions are frequently misused. • The writer's voice/tone is not evident.
Insufficient INS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The writing has been awarded an INS for Content.

Conventions

Focus

When marking **CONVENTIONS** appropriate for Grade 9 narrative/essay writing, the marker should consider the extent to which the writer has control of

- mechanics (spelling, punctuation, capitalization, indenting for new speakers, etc.) and usage (agreement of subject–verb, agreement of pronoun–antecedent, etc.)
- clarity and flow of the response

Proportion of error to length and complexity of response must be considered.

Meets the Standard of Excellence 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality of the writing is enhanced because it is essentially error-free. • The relative absence of error is impressive considering the complexity of the response.
Approaches the Standard of Excellence 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality of the writing is sustained because it contains only minor convention errors. • Any errors that are present do not reduce the clarity or interrupt the flow of the response.
Clearly Meets the Acceptable Standard 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality of the writing is sustained through generally correct use of conventions. • Errors that are present may reduce the clarity or interrupt the flow of the response.
Does Not Clearly Meet the Acceptable Standard 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality of the writing is weakened by the frequently incorrect use of conventions. • Many of these errors reduce the clarity and interrupt the flow of the response.
Clearly Below the Acceptable Standard 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality of the writing is limited by the consistently incorrect use of conventions. • These errors severely reduce the clarity and interrupt the flow of the response.
Insufficient INS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The writing has been awarded an INS for Content.

Content

Focus

When marking **CONTENT** appropriate for Grade 9 functional writing, the marker should consider

- effectiveness of ideas and organization of the topic
- how the purpose of the assignment is fulfilled with complete and appropriate information
- consistent application of format for business letter and envelope

Meets the Standard of Excellence 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ideas are well developed and organization of the topic is clear and effective. • Complete information is presented, and this information is enhanced by precise and appropriate details that effectively fulfill the purpose. • The letter and envelope are essentially free from format errors and/or omissions.
Approaches the Standard of Excellence 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ideas are generally well developed and organization of the topic is generally effective. • Complete information is presented, and this information is substantiated by appropriate details that fulfill the purpose. • The letter and envelope contain few format errors and/or omissions.
Clearly Meets the Acceptable Standard 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ideas are adequately developed and organization of the topic is adequate. • Sufficient information is given, and this information is supported by enough detail to fulfill the purpose. • The letter and envelope contain occasional format errors and/or omissions.
Does Not Clearly Meet the Acceptable Standard 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ideas are poorly developed and organization of the topic is ineffective. • Information is lacking. Supporting details are scant, insignificant, and/or irrelevant. The purpose is only partially fulfilled. • The letter and envelope contain frequent format errors and/or omissions.
Clearly Below the Acceptable Standard 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ideas are not developed and organization of the topic, if present, is inadequate. • Information is inappropriate and/or missing. The purpose is not fulfilled. • The letter and envelope contain numerous and glaring format errors and/or omissions.
Insufficient INS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The marker can discern no evidence of an attempt to fulfill the assignment, or the writing is so deficient in length that it is not possible to assess content.

Note: *Content and Content Management are equally weighted.*

Please advise students that their work must be related to the assignment. Those letters that are completely “off topic” will be awarded an Insufficient.

Content Management

Focus

When marking **CONTENT MANAGEMENT** appropriate for Grade 9 functional writing, the marker should consider

- accuracy and effectiveness of words and expressions
- control of sentence structure, usage, and mechanics (spelling, punctuation, etc.)
- appropriateness of tone for a business letter and awareness of audience

Proportion of error to length and complexity of response must be considered.

Meets the Standard of Excellence 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Words and expressions used are consistently accurate and effective. • The writing demonstrates confident and consistent control of sentence structure, usage, and mechanics. • A tone appropriate for the addressee is clearly and effectively maintained.
Approaches the Standard of Excellence 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Words and expressions used are usually accurate and effective. • The writing demonstrates competent and generally consistent control of sentence structure, usage, and mechanics. • A tone appropriate for the addressee is clearly maintained.
Clearly Meets the Acceptable Standard 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Words and expressions used are generally accurate and occasionally effective. • The writing demonstrates basic control of sentence structure, usage, and mechanics. Errors may occasionally impede meaning. • A tone appropriate for the addressee is generally maintained.
Does Not Clearly Meet the Acceptable Standard 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Words and expressions used are frequently inaccurate and/or misused. • The writing demonstrates faltering control of sentence structure, usage, and mechanics. Errors impede meaning. • A tone appropriate for the addressee is evident but not maintained.
Clearly Below the Acceptable Standard 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Words and expressions are inaccurate and/or misused. • The writing demonstrates lack of control of sentence structure, usage, and mechanics. Errors severely impede meaning. • Little awareness of tone appropriate for the addressee is evident.
Insufficient INS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The writing has been awarded an INS for Content.

Part B: Reading

Part B: Reading of the Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test requires students to read selections that include a variety of informational and narrative/poetic texts with implicit ideas and details. The content of these selections is often abstract and may be unfamiliar or specialized. After reading these selections, students answer 55 multiple-choice questions based on the readings.

The blueprint showing the approximate number of questions in each category appears on the next page.

Development

Reading selections are chosen according to the following general guidelines.

- Reading selections, whenever possible, should be relatively short but should contain a beginning, a middle, and an end.
- Reading selections should reflect the interests of the majority of Grade 9 students.
- Reading selections should be of appropriate difficulty for Grade 9 students.
- Canadian content should be used extensively.

The following considerations guide question development.

- Questions relating to each reading selection should be arranged from specific to general, wherever practical.
- Questions should test students' ability to understand and analyze the reading selections and to make judgements about their form and content. Only questions dealing with significant aspects of the reading selections should be asked.

Blueprint for Part B: Reading

The blueprint for *Part B: Reading* shows the reporting categories and language function under which questions are classified. The number of questions in each category is approximate.

Reporting Category	Question Distribution by Language Function		Number and Proportion of Questions
	Informational	Narrative/Poetic	
Identifying and Interpreting Ideas and Details Students recognize explicit or implicit ideas and details and make inferences about the relationships between ideas and details.	6	11	17 (31%)
Interpreting Text Organization Students identify and analyze the author's use of genre. Students identify and analyze the author's choice of form, organizational structure, style, literary techniques, text features, and conventions.	5	6	11 (20%)
Associating Meaning Students use contextual clues to determine the connotative meaning of words, phrases, and figurative language.	5	6	11 (20%)
Synthesizing Ideas Students make generalizations by integrating information from an entire selection in order to identify the purpose, theme, main idea, or mood of the selection.	6	10	16 (29%)
Number and Proportion of Questions	22 (40%)	33 (60%)	55 (100%)

Preparing Students for the English Language Arts Test

Suggestions for Preparing Students

The best way to prepare students for writing the achievement tests is to teach the curriculum well and to ensure that children know what is expected. Many of the skills and attitudes that support test writing are, in fact, good skills and strategies for approaching all kinds of learning tasks.

Teachers may also wish, however, to familiarize their students with the format of both *Part A: Writing* and *Part B: Reading* by working through the questions from previous achievement tests.

Teachers should also familiarize students with the scoring guides in this bulletin. With instruction, students may be able to use these guides effectively when evaluating their own writing or that of peers.

In 1989 and 1993, the Learner Assessment Branch published booklets entitled *Samples of Students' Writing*. These samples came from the student responses given on the 1988 and 1992 Language Arts achievement tests. These booklets are available through LRDC. Teachers are encouraged to share these samples and the accompanying commentaries with students.

Teachers are also encouraged to share the following information with their students to help them prepare for the Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test.

Suggestions for Writing the Test

Part A: Writing

Students are encouraged to adopt the following strategies for writing the test:

Plan your available time carefully. We suggest that you use all the time available to you to carefully *read* the assignment and *think* about what you are being asked to do, to *plan* your writing so that it is focused, unified, and coherent, and to *proofread* your writing.

Read all the instructions carefully and do what the assignments ask you to do. The time you spend in reading and thinking about the assignments is time well spent. Many students find that highlighting or underlining key words in the assignments helps them to focus on what is expected.

Plan your writing using the pages provided. You should choose a planning strategy that helps you to focus your ideas. You may want to try a

- web
- chart
- list (main ideas, character, etc.)
- plot outline (diagram)
- RAFTS model (role, audience, focus, topic, strong verbs)

Use your reference materials. You are allowed the use of a dictionary and a thesaurus when writing Part A. Use a dictionary to look up the meanings of words that you want to use but are not completely sure about and to ensure that you spell words correctly. A thesaurus can be useful if you need to find a more precise word for the context you are developing, but you should be careful not to overuse a thesaurus.

Keep in mind the characteristics of effective writing.

- Awareness of audience (appropriateness of tone and use of correct language)
- Completeness of information (enough detail to fulfill purpose)
- Relevance of information (all details pertain to the purpose)
- Clarity of information (all details are specific and easily understood by the reader)

Proofread your work and correct errors directly on your first draft. You may double-space your writing, if you think it will allow you to make corrections more easily.

Familiarize yourself with business letter formats and envelope addressing. See pages 19 to 21.

Part B: Reading

Read the material using the strategy that works best for you. You should either

- read the selection and think carefully about it before you try any of the multiple-choice questions associated with the reading selection **OR**
- read the questions first and then read the selection, keeping in mind the questions you will need to answer

Each set of multiple-choice questions is designed to take you back through the reading selection in a certain way. The questions are ordered according to the location of the answers in the passage. For example, the answer to the first question will likely appear near the beginning of the passage, and so on. Questions relating to the

reading selection as a whole will appear at the end of the set of questions.

Consider all forms of information provided. Information will be presented not only in words but also in visual forms such as cartoons, pictures, or charts.

Take the time to reread the lines that are referred to in a question. Many questions contain quotations from the selection with line references indicated. It is always worthwhile to reread the lines that are referenced and consider the meanings of these lines in both their immediate context in the selection and the context of the selection as a whole.

Read carefully all four alternatives (A, B, C, and D) before choosing the answer that you think is best. Some of the questions are designed to test your ability to make a judgement. These questions will often include a bold-faced qualifier such as **best**, **most strongly**, or **most clearly** in their stems. All of the alternatives (A, B, C, and D) are, to some degree, correct, but one of the alternatives will be “best” in that it takes more of the reading selection into account or can be supported most strongly by reference to the reading selection.

Work from partial knowledge when it is appropriate to do so. If a correct or best answer does not become obvious fairly quickly, you may want to eliminate the answers that seem least appropriate and then use your judgement to select an answer from those that remain.

For further suggestions, see *Teaching Students with Learning Disabilities*, Alberta Learning, Special Programs Branch, pages LD122 to 124.

ALL of the 2000 achievement tests are secured. The 1998 and the 1999 achievement tests are no longer secured and are posted on the Alberta Learning web site <http://ednet.edc.gov.ab.ca>.

Format of a Business Letter

There are three basic business letter formats. Any of these formats is appropriate and acceptable for the test. What is most important is that students choose one format and use it consistently, so that the overall appearance of the letter is attractive.

Note: Students may double-space their work, if they think it will allow them to make changes more easily. This should only be applied to the body of the letter and not to the other parts.

Parts of the Business Letter (see following page)

1. Heading

The heading consists of your address and the date.

501 Spring Street
Regina SK R3T 4N7
January 3, 2000

2. Inside Address

The inside address consists of the name and address of the person to whom you are writing. It usually appears four lines below the heading if a word processor is used, or one line below if it is handwritten.

Sam Hunt, Director
The Knitting Mill
1409 3 Avenue
Toronto ON L3V 7B1

3. Salutation

The most traditional salutation or greeting for a business letter is *Dear* followed by Mr., Ms., Mrs., or Miss and the person's last name, and ending with a colon.

Dear Mr. Smith:
Dear Ms. Black:
Dear Mrs. Brown:
Dear Miss Green:

4. Body

The body is the main part of the letter. In it, you write what you have to say to the person. Skip one line after the salutation.

- Be concise. Ensure that sufficient information is given so that your purpose is clearly understood and your request well received.
- Business letters are usually formal, so the language that you use should also be formal.

5. Closing

The closing is the ending to your letter. It appears at the bottom of the letter, under the body. Skip one line after the body. Only the first word in the closing should be capitalized. It is always followed by a comma.

Yours truly,
Sincerely,

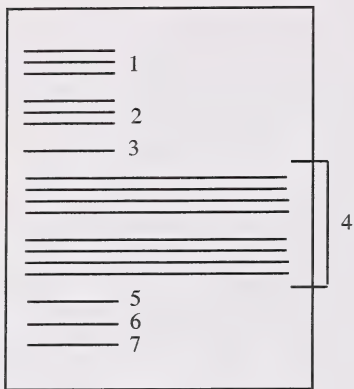
6. Signature

The signature is your full name signed. Your signature should appear directly below the closing. It should always be written in ink.

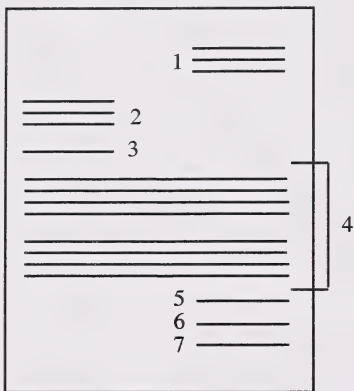
7. Your name printed

8. Commonly Used Abbreviations for Provinces and Territories

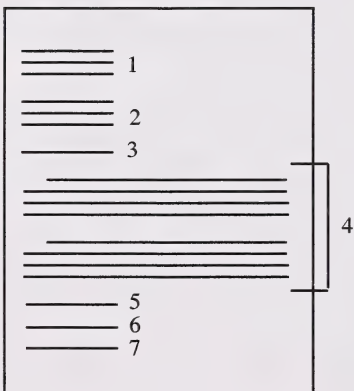
Province	Symbol
Alberta	AB
British Columbia	BC
Manitoba	MB
New Brunswick	NB
Newfoundland	NF
Northwest Territories	NT
Nova Scotia	NS
Nunavut	NT
Ontario	ON
Prince Edward Island	PE
Quebec	QC or PQ
Saskatchewan	SK
Yukon	YT



The block format. In this format, all parts of the letter run along the left side of the page (margin). No paragraphs in the body are indented.



The modified block format. In this format, the heading and the closing and signature run along the right margin. All the other parts run along the left margin.



The semiblock format. This format is the same as the block format, except that the paragraphs in the body are indented.

Addressing an Envelope

The diagram shows a rectangular envelope. In the top left corner, there are three horizontal lines for the return address, with a circled number 1 next to them. In the center of the envelope, there are four horizontal lines for the mailing address, with a circled number 2 next to them.

1. Return Address

The return address is the name and address of the person sending the letter. The return address appears in the top left corner of the envelope and consists of your name, street address, city or town, province, and postal code.

JEAN BROWN
13 SPRING RD
TORONTO ON L2R 3V6

2. Mailing Address

The mailing address is the name and address to which the letter is being sent. It always appears in the centre of the envelope. In a business letter, the address on the envelope is the same as the inside address of the letter. There may be separate lines for the title of the addressee (Editor, Director, President), the division or department the person works in, and the name of his or her company, business, or organization.

SAM HUNT
DIRECTOR
THE KNITTING MILL
1403 3 AVE
TORONTO ON L3V 7B1

The following points are taken from the *Canadian Addressing Standards* document at <http://www.canadapost.ca>.

1. Addresses should be typed or written in upper case or block letters.
2. All lines of the address must be formatted with a uniform left margin.
3. Punctuation marks (commas, periods, etc.) should not be used unless they are part of a place name (e.g., ST. JOHN'S).
4. The postal code should always appear on the same line as the municipality and province name and should be separated from the province by two spaces.
5. The two-letter symbol for the province name should be used wherever possible (see previous page).
6. The return address should be formatted in the same way as the main address.

Learner Assessment Branch Contacts

Mailing Address

Learner Assessment Branch
Alberta Learning
11160 Jasper Avenue
Edmonton AB T5K 0L2

Telephone: 780-427-0010
Toll-free telephone connection: 310-0000
Fax: 780-422-3206
Alberta Learning web site:
www.learning.gov.ab.ca

Questions or comments regarding this bulletin should be directed to

Doug Burns
Assistant Director
Doug.Burns@gov.ab.ca

David Woodland
Grades 6 and 9 English Language Arts Assessment Specialist
David.Woodland@gov.ab.ca



